<u>Internal Communication with Jay Barwick</u>
The Shred Coach Podcast Transcription

TOM

Jay Barwick, welcome to The Shred Coach Podcast. I'm glad you're here. So, which company do you work for?

JAY

I am with River Mill Data Management and Savannah Shredding.

TOM

And where are you located? Savannah tends to give it away, but…

JAY

We're actually located in Columbus, Georgia. My drivers in Savanna work remotely. We've been around since 2001, provide onsite shredding for the Southern half of Georgia and a small part of Alabama. Also offer record storage, scanning, media vault storage, electronics removal, and recycling.

TOM

So, you got a full offering.

Yeah, we do. We stay pretty, you know, we keep ourselves busy.

TOM

Good. Good. So, tell me about your shredding operation. You said you're mobile- are you primarily mobile based or are you mobile and plant? What's your makeup in that regard?

JAY

As far as paper shredding, we're 100% mobile. We are certified for offsite, hard drive, SSD and non-paper media like computer media destruction. We're certified for, paper, hard drive, SSD, non-paper and product destruction promoted.

TOM

Got it. So how many trucks roughly are you running and how many staff? What's the size of your operation?

JAY

Right now, I'm down a truck that I have another one on order, but right now we have six trucks in Columbus and two in Savannah.

TOM

Okay, so you're running eight trucks and that would mean what are you running? 12, 15 staff? What's your staff count?

JAY

14.

TOM

14. Well, that was pretty good guests on my part. All right. And you said you service Southern Georgia and a little bit of Alabama, you said.

JAY

Small sliver of Alabama. We go maybe 30, 40 miles west of us, cause we're right on the Alabama border. But it's a very small portion of Alabama that we service.

TOM

Got it. Got it. Okay. So, we have contextually the kind of company you are, and as you know, the focus of this podcast is stuff you've done or implemented or strategies or tactics that have had a discernible impact on your business. So, let's start with that. What's- as you think about your business and what you guys do, what is something that you want to talk about today?

JAY

Well, you know, I was reading through the pod- I was listening to the podcast the other day, and I saw Cory Tomczyk spoke on over-communicating with the customer. I thought it'd be a good idea to talk about improved communication in the workplace.

TOM

Hmm. Okay.

JAY

Kind of expand on that.

TOM

Yeah.

JAY

You know, one of the things we do around here, we have weekly office staff meetings every Monday morning to get all the office staff on the same page as to what's going on that week, the status of our trucks, you know, what big purges are coming up, you know, anything we need to know about, if there's a shred event coming up that weekend. Keeps everybody on the same page. We also have, I also have quarterly driver meetings, you know, with them being out on the road all the time. We get them in one Saturday every three months, about a two-hour meeting. It

gets them up to speed on new things going on, new policies. I also get a lot of really good feedback from the drivers that have helped us refine our policies. And it also, you know, they're also able to tell me my routes are getting overloaded. We need, you know, we're having an issue with this customer or, you know, this customer says this and needs more service. So, it's a really good tool for that. Yeah. I implemented that probably about seven or eight years ago and it's been a really great tool.

TOM

Nice. Nice. Let's go back allow me to just jump back a little bit here. You talk about, really improving internal communications, but I guess the question for me that precedes that sometimes is, was there an issue with the internal communications that led you to make a deliberate decision to do this?

JAY

At the time, you know, if something was going, if something needed to be communicated to the driver, it was either just a paper memo in their box or catch them as they come in and, you know, sometimes they don't come in until after you leave. We have them leaving sometimes at six o'clock in the morning. Sometimes they don't get back until six 30 at night. So, sometimes you don't see a driver for three or four days. The office staff, stuff was kind of getting communicated by word of mouth, but it wasn't… there needed to be some improvement there. So, it's really helping a lot, get everybody on the same page,

TOM

Yeah.

JAY

On the improved communication, there's also other tools that we've been using. One important thing that my dad, who founded the company in 2001, has always been adamant about, and I heard it brought up a lot this year at the NAID conference is when you call you speak with the live person instead of getting a telephone tree. That's very important because it improves communication with the client and it improves that client relationship. Because I don't know about you if I call someplace and I'm on a… I'm going through a phone tree for five minutes, by the time I get on the phone with the person I'm already mad.

We've also implemented email distribution groups. Yeah. So, if I need to send something to the sales team, I just send it to sales@rivermill.net. If I want to send it to the whole office staff, office@rivermill.net. Those help because it sends an email to the right people. It keeps the right people in the communication and it doesn't go to people who don't need it. We also use an app on our phone, you know, how drivers have to do their daily inspections?

TOM

Yeah.

JAY

There's an app for that. They do their daily inspections on that. And once they've completed it, it sends it to me, dad and our maintenance technician. So, we're all on the same page. We know what's going on with the trucks at all times. If there's any issues they notated on there. Yeah, we don't have to wait for them to get back from the route and say, “Okay, you're having an issue with your windshield” or, you know, “A rock hit your windshield, it got cracked”. We can go ahead and schedule.

TOM

Interesting- What, what app is that?

JAY

It’s called Whip Around.

TOM

Whip Around? Like whip, like as in, something that you hit…

JAY

As in “crack the whip”. Yeah.

TOM

Crack the whip. Okay. Whip Around is the app. And it goes on like a mobile? Does it go on drivers’ phones or do you provide those to drivers?

All of our CDL trucks have tablets in them because we have, you know, for the ELD.

TOM

Right.

JAY

But all of our drivers have phones too. You just download the app, I set up the users there, they log in with their email and password. And yeah, it tells them choose an asset, you pick the truck and they do a pre-trip inspection and post-trip inspection every day.

TOM

Wow. And so that app really solidifies both some internal communication that often gets missed when a driver shows up at six 30 at night, nobody's there to receive them per se. So, you're automatically in real time, both in morning and evening, getting the actual inspection reports from them.

JAY

Right. And I'm not just getting it, dad's also getting it. And our in-house maintenance technician is also getting it. So, he knows if the truck needs to be scheduled to come, to go to the shop when it gets back. So, it's been a very helpful tool. We started using that about a year and a half ago, and it is really been a game changer on stuff.

TOM

What I like about that is because you're talking about internal communication, but interestingly, using a tool like that allows for internal communication that doesn't necessarily seem like an internal communication tool. But in reality, it is.

JAY

But it keeps everybody up to date and on the same page. And that is what's important.

TOM

Yeah. That's really good. Really good. So, what other things are you doing internally to support and improve communication?

JAY

Yeah, we have an open-door policy. Anytime somebody needs to talk about anything, whether it be personal, business related or whatnot, we're always available. You know, anybody can come to me at any time and I may be slaying busy, but if they say, "Jay, I really need to talk to you." Okay. Let's talk.

Yeah, I do still put out memos, you know, we put out, driver notes on work orders, of course, for, you know, upcoming stuff. One thing we have started doing in the past three or four years with driver notes is, when we put a note in there, we put the data service on there for that note. So, we know once it's been completed to take that note out and it doesn't just stay on there. You know, approximately five bins to shred and it doesn't just stay on there for the next six months and the driver doesn't know.

TOM

Got it.

JAY

So, yeah, the purpose of everything was conveying that feedback for the drivers with the driver meetings. Also, it helps identify areas of improvement, problem areas, things that are actually being implemented well. It helps us stay on track on that, and it also helps us to recognize accomplishments.

TOM

Right.

JAY

Because, you know, our drivers and our employees do a really fantastic job. And it also ensures that they have the resources they need.

TOM

Right. Yeah. So, in terms of your… so you talked about your Whip Around tool. So, in your regular office staff meeting flow, do you use tools? Do you use a process? What's- like, do you have a structure that you engage? Because a lot of times there's like a DNA to the way people do things. And I'm just wondering, do you have any specific types of ways that you do this, that enhances that internal communication capability?

JAY

Yeah. With our weekly meetings, you know, we start out with our maintenance technician and say, "What's going on with the trucks?" That's the important thing. And then we move on to what's going on this week. You know, are there any issues? And then, you know, "Hey, what's going on with sales, what projects are you working on? You know, what do we need?" And then we will also discuss, "Hey, I need a new report from the software vendor" or stuff along those lines, what do we, you know, now what do we need?

The driver meetings, yes, I actually, it's usually about three or four pages full of notes that I hand out to every driver. There's also handouts, we open the meeting, then we go into new things as far as policies. We'll discuss trucks, their paperwork and their route. And we'll close it up with discussion points. Like, I just had one last weekend. You know, one of the discussion points was, "Hey, we've got a new truck on order of here's what it is. And here's when it should be here. Any routes that need improvement?" And I always end it with, "Okay. Open discussion. Whatever y'all want to talk about. I want it. Yeah. I want to hear from y'all." It gives me a lot of feedback from the drivers, you know, I'll hear, "This is an issue we're having."

So, we've actually been revising over the last month or two exactly how we're handling residentials because most shred companies will tell you residentials can be… difficult. So, we've been kind of revising a checklist for the sales team to go over when dealing with a residential client to eliminate those problems before the driver shows up. You know, one problem the drivers were having was we can't go on a concrete driveway; a CDL truck will crack a residential concrete. And we were showing up to these residential stops where it says park at the road and they've got a quarter mile long driveway. So, you know, we're coming up with a process to help alleviate those problems before they happen. At what point does the resident just need to meet you, meet you at the road with their stuff, what we're not going to do what we are going to do. And the drivers actually helped me refine that.

TOM

Interesting. That's, I mean… boots on the ground, drivers are the eyes and ears of the company in many ways. It's not those of us in the office, standing back and managing the spreadsheets and

managing the data. It's those people on the front lines that are learning and seeing and experiencing all of the issues that show up that then cause you to come back and change policy.

JAY

Exactly.

TOM

It’s not often the other way around.

JAY

We talked to the customers all the time on the phone, but what you have to remember is the driver is the face of the company. They're the ones that the customer sees all the time. How well they perform their job and, you know, if they've got the right tools, that goes back to the image of your company. They're the ones that the customer actually puts a name to a face with. And it’s very important that, you know, we set them up to succeed.

TOM

Yeah, that's really powerful. So, the last couple of years, obviously drivers have been in short supply…

JAY

I'm actually looking for one right now.

TOM

Are you? Yeah. So, how does this internal communication mechanism, specifically around drivers, how do you believe it's supported retention of drivers, stability of your workforce? Have you seen any connection to that?

JAY

Yes, actually, most of our drivers... we have one that actually left and then came back, but most of our drivers have been here at least four years. I've got some, who've been here over 10. We want to keep our drivers happy. You know, they do a good job, but the effect of all this is, you know, we have a more knowledgeable staff.

TOM

Yeah.

JAY

It increases teamwork, helps increase morale because when they're giving feedback, it shows them that they matter, their opinion is important, not just “Go do this.” And that's important because with a small business, everybody becomes like family and you want communication with family and you want to know what's on their mind. Regardless of the topic you want to

know what's on their mind. You want to be available to talk to them. But another effect of this is improved customer satisfaction and better online reviews.

TOM

How do you connect that dot?

JAY

We actually have issued business cards to our drivers with, on the back of it, we have, "You were serviced by:" and they can write their name. And then there's our customer satisfaction survey written on there and also a QR code where they can just scan it. And it'll take them to a "How did we do page". Good review, it takes them right to Google so they can leave a review there. We have one driver who literally gets five to six compliments a week.

TOM

Wow.

JAY

I mean, she is constantly getting good reviews. It's hard to keep up with it.

TOM

So, I'm just going to stop you there for a second because you just gave away a really interesting secret, which is *she* gets incredibly good reviews. And this, I think, is something that I believe our industry misses more than it gains is that some of the best drivers in the industry are actually women.

JAY

Oh, yes. I mean, she's amazing. My driver in Savannah is a total rock star. I mean, doesn't matter if you're a man or a woman, if you can do the job, we've got a place for you. Yeah, I think there's a stigma that a woman can't handle the job because there's a lot of heavy lifting and that is not the case.

TOM

Right.

JAY

Yeah. If they tell us in the interview, "Yes, we can handle it", we may say, "Okay, here's a full 95, prove it". But, if you can handle the job and you can manage your route, then…

TOM

Yeah. That's really cool. So, what have been some of the obstacles in trying to improve internal communications? Where have you hit walls? Where have you hit roadblocks to that? Because inevitably we all want communication to work, whether it's family or small business or large

business and communication has all these places where it runs into walls. So, where have you found obstacles in your process?

JAY

You have some people who are more resistant to new technology and new policies than others. And that does create a little bit of an obstacle. Some of the things I've tried to implement did not go over well because of that. For the most part, I haven't had that many issues. Yeah, there's a learning curve to everything just like with a new software update or something along those lines, there's always going to be a bit of a learning curve.

For the most part, most of these things I've tried to implement have gone over well and been well received. We also do group texts with the drivers, you know, when needed. And I actually tried to do a policy change on something with them yesterday and I didn't get very good feedback. So, we went another, we actually ended up going another route.

TOM

Well, yeah, sometimes we realize the biggest obstacle is us. We're the ones trying to do stuff and we create these walls for ourselves. So, yeah, that's interesting. So, in terms of the flow of this, if another shredder came to you and said, "What's the biggest lesson you've learned in this process of really improving your internal communication?" What's the thing that you would say is the highest leverage point for you? Where do you get the best bang for the buck?

JAY

That's actually a good question. I would say my driver meetings, honestly. We have done so many policy revisions because of feedback from our drivers. You know, we've created new routes, we've rebalanced some routes, we've done away with some routes. They give us a lot of feedback. We say, "This is coming up and, you know, this is how we need to do it." And they say, "Well, we think we have a better way". And if you got a better way, I'm all ears, you know? So, I think that is probably one of the best communication tools that we've implemented, because you get feedback from the drivers, it also makes them feel like more of the team. And that is… that's important.

TOM

Yeah, well, that's very cool. And, you know, I like to ask as we talk about this, is there an obvious or an overt value. I like to make these shows worth $10,000 to anyone listening. And it sounds to me like, I mean, while you can't put a deliberate number on this, it sounds like even in your high leverage, internal meetings with your drivers, the benefit of that has shown up in terms of their stability, their retention, the impact, even what you said earlier on their ability to go out because they feel connected to go out and get reviews on a regular basis. That sounds like it's got a flywheel effect to it that works.

JAY

Exactly. Increased morale is always going to lead to increased employee retention.

TOM

Yeah.

JAY

You have a happy employee, they are a hundred times more likely to stay with you than somebody who is just there in a warm body. And that's what we want. We want somebody who feels connected with the company. When we get somebody, we want them to stay.

TOM

Right, right. Yeah. That's really good.

So, I was digging in a little bit on your history. And, I know that sounds like a bit of a creeper kind of thing to do, but I discovered that way back in the day you studied IT, networking servers, that kind of thing. And before you came into the family business, it sounds like. So, how has that experience impacted how you think about running a shredding, records, information management, data services, business? How does that cause you to think differently? Or what did you bring from that history into the role you play now?

JAY

Well, actually I was in school when I started working here. I started, well, I started out working in the warehouse and then gradually worked into the office and… but yeah, my degrees is as a networking specialist. It's definitely decreased IT costs because I can handle all that in-house.

TOM

That's cool. Yeah, that's a major benefit, isn't it? Right there.

JAY

Yeah. But also, it also gives me more of a focus than a lot of companies on dealing with software vendors. You know, if I'm having an issue or something, I will definitely let the software vendor know, “Hey, can this feature be added? This is an issue here. Here's what I've tried doing to see if we can get rid of it. It's not working, I need further help.” Setting up networking, setting up the email distribution groups. It's easier when you can do it in-house than have to pay someone else to do it.

TOM

Outsource it.

JAY

Yeah, and outsource it.

TOM

Yeah, well, there's an interesting way of thinking, though, about the world that comes when you understand networking. When you understand, topography of how a network sets up and it makes me think, actually as you were talking today with my knowledge of what I found out in LinkedIn about you, that even the way you're thinking about driver communication has, in its roots, a networking mechanism, right? Which is, how do we keep connecting so that we never have downtime, so that we never have issues in the network? And internal communication to me is all about this perpetual networking effect that you're doing that means you're plugged in and that RJ 45 never loses its connection, right? So…

JAY

And with networking, it's also setting up security.

TOM

Right.

JAY

It’s protecting your network.

TOM

Yeah. That's really good. Well, Jay, really appreciate you sharing this. I love this concept of internal communication. the leavers that you've pushed to ensure that that happens and then the impact of that on your business. And, I really appreciate you taking the time to share this with us on The Shred Coach Podcast.

JAY

Well, thank you for having me, Tom.